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# State of the Faculty Report - November 2007

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# **The University of Southern Mississippi**

Faculty Senate

Faculty Welfare Committee

## **State of the Faculty Report**

**August/September 2007**

November 2, 2007

Final Report

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## University Data

During Spring 2007 the Faculty Welfare Committee, to assist the administration in prioritization of faculty concerns during and following transition of administrations, met with Dr. Joan Exline, Assistant to the President, Michelle Arrington, Director of the Institutional Research Office, and Russ Willis, Director of the Department of Human Resources to access and review data relative to faculty welfare. Data sets reviewed included Employee Rosters FY 2002-2007 and Faculty Courses Fall 2006 – Spring 2007. An initial overview of data sets without detailed analysis indicated general tendencies to (a) disparities in compensation, (b) differences in Coast and Hattiesburg reporting, (c) faculty course overloads associated with relatively smaller class size, and (d) disparate course sharing practices. The University has no means to collect and aggregate data regarding faculty research/scholarship or service.

## **Faculty Satisfaction Survey**

Upon general review of faculty information, members of the Faculty Welfare Committee along with Faculty Senate officers met with Dr. Bobby Middlebrooks, Interim Provost, to discuss development and implementation of a yearly or ongoing process to survey faculty concerns and satisfaction with their responsibilities and University community. Several processes were discussed and investigated including securing an online questionnaire (Chuck Knight, Technology Operations Officer developed a sample) and hard-copy processes. Survey questions were developed based on an existing well-validated instrument, the Teacher Satisfaction Survey (National Association of Secondary School Principals, 1987, [http://www.eric.ed.gov:80/ERICWebPortal/custom/portlets/recordDetails/detailmini.jsp?\\_nfpb=true&\\_E\\_RICExtSearch\\_SearchValue\\_0=ED300462&ERICExtSearch\\_SearchType\\_0=eric\\_accno&accno=ED300462](http://www.eric.ed.gov:80/ERICWebPortal/custom/portlets/recordDetails/detailmini.jsp?_nfpb=true&_E_RICExtSearch_SearchValue_0=ED300462&ERICExtSearch_SearchType_0=eric_accno&accno=ED300462))

Having expressed concerns for confidentiality in University management of online information, the committee decided to administer a hard copy survey that was printed and organized by the Institutional Review Office in folders with instructions for administration by departmental Faculty Senators and delivered to each college through the Office of the Dean for distribution to each Departmental Chair. An electronic copy was forwarded to Dr. Pat Joachim, Associate Provost Gulf Coast for dissemination to coastal units. Survey instructions specified that Faculty Senators administer the survey during the first Fall 2007 departmental faculty meeting. While many Senators were able to follow survey instructions, many problems occurred as a result of delivery through administrative units. Several departmental faculty members reported failure of the department to observe survey instructions including:

- a) Departmental administrators and/or their staff remaining in the room used for conducting the survey
- b) Departmental administrators failing to deliver the survey to Senators for administration during the faculty meeting
- c) Departments that do not schedule faculty meetings at the beginning of the semester
- d) Disbursement of departmental faculty over multiple campuses, resulting in lack of access to participation in the survey

Resulting from problems associated with questionnaire administration, many faculty members communicated a reluctance to provide candid responses and many expressed discomfort in addressing demographic questions that could reveal their identity to their administrators.

## **Results**

While it is apparent that survey reliability is diminished due to problems reported and observed in questionnaire administration, aggregated results of the Faculty Satisfaction Survey provide a good starting point for discussions of faculty satisfaction and concerns that can inform both the Faculty Senate and University administration in prioritization of efforts to improve campus productivity and relations.

## **Participation**

A total of 286 faculty members ( %) responded to surveys received prior to October 1, 2007 including responses from the College of Arts and Letters (115), College of Health (36), University Libraries (15), College of Education and Psychology (47) College of Science and Technology (40), College of Business (33)

### *Satisfaction*

Though concerns and satisfaction levels vary between colleges and departments, overall satisfaction is positive though clearly levels of trust can be improved (55.8% satisfied or highly satisfied). The College of Health reported highest levels of satisfaction(66.5%), followed in order by the College of Business (58.0%), College of Science and Technology (55.4%), College of Arts and Letters (54.1%), College of Education and Psychology (53.4%), and University Libraries (51.0%).

## **Needs**

Faculty members were asked to rate from 1 (very low need) to 5 (very high need) the degree to which they felt the need to review policies and procedures impacting productivity (Table 1). Again, while participation rates and reluctance to respond candidly may have skewed the results, there are clearly areas of concern that need to be addressed.

**Table 1: Ranking of faculty concerns based on ratings per college**

	<b>COAL</b>	<b>COB</b>	<b>COEP</b>	<b>COH</b>	<b>COST</b>	<b>UL</b>	<b>Rank</b>
Compensation	1	5	2	1	1	1	<b>1</b>
Research	2	6	1	2	3	2	<b>2</b>
Support	3	1	3	3	6	6	<b>3.5</b>
Benefits	5	2	5	4	2	4	<b>3.5</b>
Responsibilities	4	3	4	5	4	3	<b>4</b>
Service	6	4	6	6	5	5	<b>5</b>

(1) Compensation (annual raises, merit pay, salary, etc): Four of the six units reported compensatory policies and practices as the highest need area (COAL, COH, COST, UL) with COEP closely ranked as an area of high need. Only the College of Business ranked the area of compensation low (5/6). Submitted comments indicated concerns for loss of colleagues due to non-competitive salaries, dissatisfaction due to disparities within departments, and salary compression practices.

(2) Research (available time, research support, professional development, travel support, etc): Across all colleges with the exception of the College of Business, concerns for professional support and development follow closely behind compensation issues. Considering the impact that conditions of compensation and professional support have on faculty morale, it is remarkable that overall satisfaction levels are as high as reported.

(3.5) Programmatic support and development: One faculty member suggested, “We are stuck in the post-SACS brain-dead mode. We need new ideas that . . . meet the needs of each program.”

(3.5) Benefits and family support services: Many comments bemoaned the present state of health care policies afforded to faculty members and their families. Several specified that services provided by the state system are the least supportive of any institution with which they had been affiliated. While USM is part of a state managed health care program, it seems important to conduct discussions of benefits concerning University advocacy for improved support.

(4) Programmatic responsibilities (teaching load, overload, course sharing, student advisement, office hours, etc): As there were few comments relative to teaching responsibilities, it may be that faculty members are resolute to continued, and some may prefer, heavy teaching loads evidenced in the 2006-07 teaching load spreadsheet provided by the Office of Institutional Research. As a comprehensive research institution, it seems counterproductive to embrace practices that impart heavy teaching loads that, in turn, may have a negative impact on research productivity. This calls to question the overall mission of the University.

(5) Service to the department, college, university, and professional community (committee assignments, accreditation documentation, etc): Ranking low or lowest in all of the colleges, there were several comments regarding the lack of university or unit level concern for faculty service. One faculty submitted: "No one cares if you do it or not!"

## **Resolution**

As the representative body of the faculty charged to give voice to all faculty concerns, the Faculty Senate resolves that the University shall support administration of the Faculty Satisfaction Survey, piloted by the Faculty Welfare Committee during the Summer and Fall 2007 Semesters. The Faculty Satisfaction Survey serves two primary purposes: it provides (a) a common venue for all faculty to voluntarily express concerns with their professional productivity and relations, and (2) a recurring measure of faculty satisfaction or trust in their workplace environment, thereby assisting university- and college-wide prioritization of needs considered by faculty to be necessary for continual development and growth.

As the University improves processes for collection and analysis of faculty information, the University shall support an electronic process for administration of the Faculty Satisfaction Survey to facilitate, streamline, and assure consistency in response participation, and shall assure confidentiality in reporting faculty information through communication of data management practices to the Faculty Senate.

We, the Faculty Senate, propose the following timeline for administration of Faculty Satisfaction Survey:

(April) Faculty Satisfaction survey available for voluntary online responses through the password-protected University server system.

(May-June) Institutional Research collects and aggregates responses

(August-September) Faculty Welfare Committee with the Center for Research Support reviews and conducts an analysis of responses

(September) Faculty Satisfaction Survey report to Faculty Senate published on the FS website for

(November) Faculty Senate officers and Faculty Welfare Committee members meet with the Provost and Vice President for Research and Economic Development to review faculty satisfaction levels and associated concerns, developing a plan procedures to address policies and practices in areas of need.